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UNCLAS RANGOON 000959

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS AID/ANE  
STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, EB, AND IO  
BANGKOK FOR AID  
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [NGO](#)

SUBJECT: IRRAWADDY FLOODING DRAWS SCANT INTEREST

**¶1.** (SBU) Starting July 18th, heavy rains caused the upper Irrawaddy River to overflow its banks, and flood waters reportedly reached four to ten feet in the Kachin State capital of Myitkyina. Local NGOs in Myitkyina reported the worst flooding since 1997, fouled wells, thousands homeless, and perhaps 50 dead. Other Kachin towns down river of Myitkyina also reported flooding, though we have no information on any major destruction or casualties. Local sources tell us the waters in Kachin State are receding.

**¶2.** (SBU) By July 25th the Irrawaddy flooding was beginning to affect Mandalay (about 250 miles down river from Myitkyina). Local NGO officials told A/DCM and visiting EAP/BCLTV deputy director, traveling in Mandalay, that the situation looked to be the worst for thirty years -- though they knew of no significant damage or loss of life yet. Already the waters are beginning to wash over the Rangoon-Mandalay highway and parallel railway line, both built near the river. Damage to these transport routes could cause significant economic problems as Mandalay, Burma's second largest city, is the commercial hub for supplying most of Upper and Central Burma with goods brought in from China.

**¶3.** (SBU) Despite the worrying situation, thus far the GOB has taken no visible action nor asked for international assistance. In the July 28th edition of regime mouthpiece "The New Light of Myanmar," an article recounts a July 24-25 visit to Myitkyina by the SPDC's Secretary Two (S-2) Lt. Gen. Thein Sein. S-2, after "fulfilling the requirements of the victims," told local officials that this type of flooding was normal and that "such kind of incident does not last long." He added that, in any event, "the magnitude of damage and loss was small." According to the UNDP in Rangoon, and the UN resident coordinator, UN agencies in Burma are closely monitoring the flooding and have told the GOB they are prepared to offer assistance. No such request has come yet, though, so the UN has not yet mounted any relief efforts.

**¶4.** (SBU) On July 27th, the MOFA Director General for Political Affairs U Thaung Tun, in a meeting with EAP/BCLTV deputy director and P/E chief, was equally dismissive of the flooding. "It's not as bad as it looks," he said, "and while we would accept help from our friends, we have no plans to request assistance from the UN community."

Martinez